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Review of salient trends and issues on energy development and use in the context of sustainable development: coordination of energy activities within the United Nations system

Coordination of energy activities within the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. At its first session, in April 1999, at the suggestion of its Sub-Group on Energy, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on the coordination of energy activities within the United Nations system for consideration by the Committee at its second session, in 2000.[1] At its substantive session of 1999, the Economic and Social Council approved the provisional agenda and documentation for the second session of the Committee, including the request for a report on coordination of energy activities within the United Nations system. The present report has been prepared in response to that request.

II. Activities of the United Nations system in the field of energy

2. United Nations entities and agencies provide detailed descriptions of their activities on a periodic basis to the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Energy for coordination purposes, and the present report is based on that information. The table provides a summary of the main areas of activities undertaken by each entity/agency in the field of energy in preparation for the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, to be held in 2001, at which the themes "Energy/atmosphere" and "Energy/transport" will be considered.

3. A major challenge in the implementation of Agenda 21 is that energy use is necessary for socio-economic development but that its use results in adverse environmental effects. U ing energy in a sustainable way, that is, to promote economic and social development at the least cost to the environment, is an integral goal of sustainable development and has been the focus of United Nations activities in the field of energy since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992. Activities in the United Nations system addressing energy issues in such areas as energy efficiency, renewable energy technologies, standards and regulations, the rationalization of energy and demand-side management are aimed at encouraging the dissemination and use of more efficient energy technologies and/or conservation in consumption patterns for a more efficient allocation of resources. The internalization of environmental costs associated with energy use is a goal of many of those activities. The extent and scope of activities undertaken vary with agency/individual entity mandates. Energy issues are incorporated in overall development programmes in those agencies with mandates relating to general economic and social development and are included in projects and programmes aimed at specific goals, such as poverty alleviation, improvement of health and population activities.

4. Most United Nations agencies/entities engaged in activities related to energy undertake specific projects and/or programmes aimed at institution and capacity-building or integrate capacity-building components in larger projects. Often, the training of nationals is incorporated in projects, including those aimed at promoting renewable energy technologies. Technical assistance is undertaken on a regular basis by the regional commissions, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the World Bank and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat in the form of policy advisory services and field projects. Financing of specific projects is provided by some agencies and the World Bank, while other United Nations agencies/entities assist in securing funding from donors and foundations. Often, donors require cooperation among agencies/entities to ensure integrated projects with no overlapping of activities, which has also encouraged better cooperation within the United Nations system.

5. The areas of emphasis adopted by individual entities are determined by and large by their mandates. The regional commissions, for example, focus on promoting regional cooperation within their respective regions and energy-related activities are undertaken accordingly. Thus, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia has facilitated the interconnection of electricity grids in that region, and the Economic Commission for Europe has assisted in identifying investment barriers related to the extension of gas and electricity networks in Europe and Central Asia. Agencies with specific mandates, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), incorporate energy

Summary of United Nations agency/entity activities in the field of energy

	Energy efficiency	*Renewable technologies*	*Standards and/or regulations*	*Capacity-building/ training*	*Rationalization/demand-side management*	*Technical assistance*	*Cooperation with other United Nations agencies/ entities*
Department of Economic and Social Affairs	X	X		X	X	X	X
ECE	X		X	X	X	X	X
ECLAC		X		X	X	X	X
ESCAP	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ESCWA	X	X	X	X		X	X
FAO	X	X		X		X	X
GEF	X	X			X		X
IAEA		X	X	X		X	X
UNDP	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
UNEP	X	X		X	X	X	X
UNESCO		X		X		X	X
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change				X			X
UNFPA				X			X
UNIDO	X	X		X		X	X
WHO	X	X		X			X
WMO	X	X		X			X
World Bank	X	X				X	X

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Matrix of activities", accessed at: http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/iaenr.htm.

aspects in various projects aimed at achieving their goals. For example, WHO has provided guidance for health impact assessments for energy policies and projects. FAO implements rural energy projects aimed at promoting sustainable development in rural areas, usually with a focus on agriculture.

III. Extent of cooperation and coordination of activities within the United Nations system in the field of energy

6. The General Assembly, at its nineteenth special session, held in 1997, stressed the need for strengthening international cooperation, especially with regard to assisting developing countries in providing energy services to all; evolving commitments with regard to the transfer of technology to developing countries and economies in transition; promoting research on and development of renewable energy technologies and, with respect to fossil fuels, cleaner technologies; and the encouragement of policies aimed at promoting the internalization of environmental costs so as to achieve a more sustainable use of energy (see A/S-19/29). It was agreed that the Commission on Sustainable Development, at its ninth session, to be held in 2001, would address those issues, with "Energy/atmosphere" as the sectoral theme and "Energy/transport" as the economic sector/major group.

7. The General Assembly also stressed the need for encouraging better coordination in the field of energy within the United Nations system, and agreed that, *inter alia*, the work of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development should be more compatible and supportive of the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

8. An Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Group on Energy was constituted in March 1996 to coordinate energy-related activities within the United Nations system, and met in October 1997 prior to the initiation of preparations for the ninth session of the Commission to discuss preparations at the inter-agency level. In addition, an informal meeting to follow up the recommendations of the General Assembly at its special session on the overall review and appraisal of the UNCED commitments was held in Vienna in October 1997.

9. The Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Energy was formally established in 1998 by the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) to facilitate coordination and cooperation among United Nations entities in energy and related areas in preparation for the ninth session of the Commission. The Task Force reports directly to IACSD and replaces the informal Inter-Agency Group on Energy.

10. The Task Force met on three occasions in 1999 and 2000 to elaborate a common system-wide approach to energy and sustainable development that facilitates the coordination of activities in the preparation for the ninth session of the Commission. All United Nations entities/agencies involved in energy and energy-related issues have participated in the sessions and, as part of preparations for the ninth session of the Commission, the Task Force has participated in the work of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development and of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Group of Experts on Energy and Sustainable Development.

11. The Task Force has drawn on the work of the former Inter-Agency Group on Energy to elaborate a common system-wide approach to energy within the United Nations system. It has agreed on general principles for a common system-wide approach, including inclusiveness, complementarity of activities, coordination and information-sharing, and consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of all energy options from a social, economic and environmental perspective. The Task Force has further agreed that work in this area should include the following main elements:

(a) The importance of collection, processing and analysis of data on energy and of dissemination of information;

(b) Policies to ensure harmonization of short and long-term goals for the development and use of energy within a sustainable energy framework;

(c) Identification and strengthening of linkages among economic, social and environmental issues, including ways and means of internalizing external environmental costs associated with energy production and use;

(d) Conversion of broad policy frameworks into specific operational strategies;

(e) Ensuring adequate energy services for both rural and urban households, especially in developing countries;

(f) Establishing and strengthening institutions and building capacity for developing sustainable energy futures;

(g) Access to financing and credits for capacity development and transfer of relevant technologies for sustainable energy.

In addition, the Task Force has agreed that the key issues identified by the Group of Experts at its first session, in February 2000 — the accessibility of energy, energy efficiency, renewable energy, advanced fossil fuel technologies, nuclear energy technologies, rural energy and energy-related issues in transportation, along with the cross-cutting issues of capacity-building, technology transfer and financial resources — are important components of the common system-wide approach.

12. To promote better cooperation and transparency, a matrix of activities has been prepared, a "living document" which is updated continuously as a reference for United Nations entities/agencies and to assist them in the coordination of their activities. Reports of the sessions and the matrix are available upon request and are posted on the Department of Economic and Social Affairs web site at: http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/iaenr.htm. The most recent version of the matrix will be made available to the Committee at its second session.

13. Although the present report does not attempt to assess the impact of activities undertaken, those reported in the matrix are executed in line with the objectives of sustainable development and as part of United Nations efforts to implement Agenda 21. The table shows that virtually every United Nations agency/entity undertaking activities in the field of energy is cooperating with other agencies/entities. Cooperation on a continual basis, effected through electronic communications between formal meetings of the Task Force, has enabled agencies to avoid duplication of effort, and many activities undertaken now complement related activities rather than overlap with them. Cooperation with organizations outside the United Nations system is a feature of some projects as well, such as that of the world energy assessment undertaken by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, together with the World Energy Council.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

14. Cooperation in the field of energy within the United Nations system has been undertaken on a formal basis since 1998 and with a view towards working more efficiently in preparing for the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Energy has facilitated the coordination of energy activities, and has been successful in its initial efforts, especially with regard to establishing a common system-wide approach to energy and sustainable development and facilitating communication and exchange of information on a regular basis. The continuation of the Task Force or the establishment of a similar mechanism beyond 2001 could prove useful as a means of ensuring continued cooperation on a permanent basis.

15. Efforts at cooperation with agencies outside the United Nations system working in the field of energy would further enhance overall cooperation in the area of energy.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1999, Supplement No. 12* (E/1999/32), chap. I.B., draft decision II.